

**Abstract 297**

**TITLE:** Microbicides and Implications for HIV and STD Prevention

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**ISSUE:** Topical microbicides are an emerging prevention technology that is user-controlled, providing an alternative method of protection for people whose partners do not use condoms. The implications of introducing a potentially less efficacious technology to the existing method mix must be examined. Microbicides would fill important gaps in HIV and STD prevention, but will require new strategies for positioning them in an overall prevention framework.

**SETTING:** Organizations and agencies engaged in HIV/AIDS prevention education and policy.

**PROJECT:** A review and analysis of existing research from public health and behavioral science literature related to the implications of introducing topical microbicides as an alternative to male or female condoms for HIV/STD prevention.

**RESULTS:** Within primary partnerships, the highest level of consistent condom use that has been achieved to date is 20%. Studies from the U.S. and globally have shown that women who perceive themselves at risk but are unable to use male condoms articulate a need for and willingness-to-use vaginal microbicides. Mathematical models predicting numbers of cases averted with the introduction of microbicides into different scenarios have shown that a less efficacious method used with greater consistency than the male condom can increase the number of protected sex acts that occur within a given

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Prevention methods less efficacious than condoms can play an important role in HIV/STD prevention by offering protection to those individuals unable to use condoms consistently. This is particularly important for people in primary partnerships, women who want to become pregnant, and women in violent or economically dependent situations, who may perceive the risk of abuse or abandonment associated with insistence on condom use as greater than the risk of infection. However, public health interventions must continue to assist women to use male and female condoms and make it clear that microbicides are not a "quick fix." Prevention messages that recommend microbicides as an option if condom use is not possible would allow individual women to make informed choices about their health. The introduction of microbicides into the HIV/STD prevention arsenal could affect the epidemic by conferring a significant degree of protection on sub-populations currently at risk.

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